

Held Several Town Hall Meetings, Visited Local Organizations, Met With Officials
April 21, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S Rep. Charlie Melancon (LA-03) completed a productive and busy district work period today, after traveling 2,287 miles in just two weeks. Rep. Melancon visited dozens of communities in the Third Congressional District, including Chalmette, Hahnville, Gonzales, Larose, Morgan City, Houma, Jeanerette, Thibodaux, New Iberia, St. Martinville, and Grand Isle. While traveling around the District, Rep. Melancon met face-to-face with hundreds of constituents and heard from them directly about the issues concerning them most.

"Over the past few weeks, I have had the pleasure of traveling around this great state of ours to meet and talk with constituents throughout the Third Congressional District," said Rep. Melancon. "These visits are my favorite part of the job, and I only wish I could spend less time in Washington and more in Louisiana."

Rep. Melancon held town hall meetings in both Gonzales and New Iberia, where constituents said they were worried about the economy, the job market, the rising cost of health care and lack of affordable insurance, and the slow progress of hurricane protection projects like Morganza-to-the-Gulf. *Pictures are available below.*

During these meetings, Rep. Melancon was able to share several pieces of good news from Washington, such as the removal of the proposed oil and gas taxes from the FY2010 budget bill recently passed by the House of Representatives.

"As a member of the House Budget Committee, I was able to successfully argue that it just didn't make sense to increase taxes on one of the few American industries that has been strong over the past few years, providing thousands of good-paying jobs for American workers" Rep. Melancon said. "Congress should be supporting the oil and gas industry, not working to cripple it with new taxes, and I am pleased that my colleagues came around to my view and removed the harmful tax increases from the budget bill."

Rep. Melancon also had the opportunity to advocate for the expansion of offshore oil and gas development in the Gulf at a public meeting held by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar in New Orleans. The meeting, held on April 8th at Tulane University, was an all-day session to gather information and comments from the public to help the new Secretary build a comprehensive energy strategy for the U.S.

The future of biofuels, including sucrose ethanol, was a main topic of discussion at Rep. Melancon's "Farm Day 2009" meeting on April 15th. Farm Day, held this year in Thibodaux, is an annual forum Rep. Melancon organizes to provide information for farmers and ranchers in south Louisiana about current legislation and policies in Washington affecting agriculture.

The focus of Farm Day 2009 was the implementation of the new Farm Bill, which became law in May 2008, including the new sucrose-ethanol program. In an effort to maintain domestic sugar prices, following the full implementation of NAFTA and CAFTA, the Farm Bill requires the USDA to purchase as much U.S.-produced sugar as necessary to maintain market prices above support levels, then sell this excess sugar to bioenergy producers for processing into ethanol.

Many sugar producers in south Louisiana are still unsure of how this new program will affect their industry, so Rep. Melancon invited Barbara Fesco from the USDA to Farm Day to listen and answer questions from farmers. As in years past, Farm Day 2009 brought together experts and policymakers with those in south Louisiana who are most affected by agricultural policy.

At a St. Charles Parish Council meeting, Rep. Melancon heard from local elected officials about the progress of levee projects. Parish officials also described challenges they were facing in their cooperation with the Corps of Engineers in building better hurricane protection for residents, and Rep. Melancon promised to investigate these issues and serve as a liaison for information.

During the Congressional recess, Rep. Melancon also visited a number of businesses and community organizations in the Third Congressional District to learn about their work. In St. Martinville, Rep. Melancon toured the African American Museum and heard about their project to facilitate internet classroom exchanges between the French immersion schools in St. Martin Parish and sister cities in Senegal. *Pictures available below.*

In Morgan City, Rep. Melancon visited the International Petroleum Museum and Exposition and talked to industry leaders about how Louisiana can build support nationwide for more offshore oil and gas drilling through better public education. *Pictures available below.*

Following the tour, Rep. Melancon commented, **"While we in south Louisiana know that offshore drilling is much cleaner, safer, and environmentally responsible than it was in the past, many Americans around the country still hold on to negative misconceptions about offshore drilling. Clearing up some of those myths will be critical to building nationwide support for expanding offshore energy production."**

Rep. Melancon also visited Metal Shark Boats, a small shipyard in Jeanerette that is seeking funding from the Recovery Act (Stimulus) to expand their operations and create an estimated 20 to 40 new jobs. Rep. Melancon praised the small business for taking this initiative and said he would continue to work to bring more of the economic recovery funding to businesses and projects in south Louisiana that will create new jobs and stimulate the local economy.

A highlight of Rep. Melancon's travels was a visit with the art class at the Terrebonne Association for Retarded Citizens in Houma. Last December, Rep. Melancon chose local folk artist and TARC client Paula Lapeyrouse to create an ornament for the White House Christmas tree. Rep. Melancon met Ms. Lapeyrouse when she came to Washington, D.C., in December to visit the White House and see her Cajun-inspired ornament, a red, white and blue ball featuring crab, shrimp and crawfish. *Pictures available below.*

"TARC and the great work they do are personally meaningful to me," said Rep. Melancon. **"As a boy in Napoleonville, I watched my mother work tirelessly to establish the Assumption Parish ARC. During my visit to TARC, I enjoyed seeing Paula again and meeting the other artists. They truly are special people."**

Pictures available for publication

Credit: Congressional staff photographer.

Gonzales Town Hall Meeting, April 8th, 2009.

Rep. Melancon talks with constituents following the town hall meeting.

Picture 1: http://www.melancon.house.gov/images/stories/Photo_Gallery/April2009/gonzalestownhall.jpg

Picture 2: http://www.melancon.house.gov/images/stories/Photo_Gallery/April2009/gonzalestownhall2.jpg

Visit with artists at Terrebonne Association for Retarded Citizens in Houma, April 9th, 2009.

Picture 1: Artist Paula Lapeyrouse shows Congressman Melancon a painting of the White House she created after her December trip to Washington, D.C.

http://www.melancon.house.gov/images/stories/Photo_Gallery/April2009/paulaandherpicture.jpg

Picture 2: Rep. Melancon and the TARC artists. Paula Lapeyrouse is to the left of Rep. Melancon.

http://www.melancon.house.gov/images/stories/Photo_Gallery/April2009/charlieandtheartists.jpg

Tour of International Petroleum Museum and Exposition in Morgan City, April 16th, 2009.

Picture 1: http://www.melancon.house.gov/images/stories/Photo_Gallery/April2009/internationalpetroleummuseumandexposition1.jpg

Picture 2: http://www.melancon.house.gov/images/stories/Photo_Gallery/April2009/internationalpetroleummuseumandexposition2.jpg

Visit to St. Martinville African American Museum, April 17th, 2009.

Picture 1: http://www.melancon.house.gov/images/stories/Photo_Gallery/April2009/stmartinvilleafricanamericanmuseum2.jpg

Picture 2: http://www.melancon.house.gov/images/stories/Photo_Gallery/April2009/stmartinvilleafricanamericanmuseum3.jpg

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